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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM RU GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: EU OBSERVER MISSION DISCUSSES POST OCTOBER 10 PLANS; MOIA SHOWS OFF IDP HOUSING

REF: A. TBILISI 1868

¶B. TBILISI 1751

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Begin Summary and Comment: European Monitoring Mission Head (EUMM) Hansjoerg Haber briefed Ambassadors on October 9 that Russian forces had withdrawn to positions outside of Georgia proper. Several controversial observation posts remain, with competing claims regarding in which territory each of these is located. Haber stressed that the EUMM will support the Georgians' efforts to convince the Russians to depart Akhalgori and to insist on access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia for EUMM monitors. The two most urgent areas of concern involve Russian occupation of Akhalgori and the observation post Pakhuliani which is along the administrative border with Abkhazia and near the Enguri dam; it is critical that the EU not just declare victory without resolving these outstanding issues. The Georgians have said that they will not permit Russian forces access to the Georgian main highway after 10 October, thereby cutting off the only access to Russian heavy vehicles to Akhalgori from Tskhinvali. In winter months, the current dirt path which is accessible to four wheel drive vehicles could become impassable. French FM Kouchner arrived October 9 and at the top of his agenda is the situation in Akhalgori. Haber is now in Brussels to brief the EU. An EU representative said that Brussels is being heavily demarched by the Russians, who are applying pressure for the EU not to provide armaments to Georgia. Given the data from the EUMM, it does not appear that the Russians intend, at least for the moment, to insist on keeping any posts that they maintained in the Zugdidi Rayon under the old CIS peacekeeping arrangement. UNHCR representatives told the Ambassador that 9,000 IDPs were already in the process of returning to homes in the former Russian-controlled "buffer zone," an impression that was reinforced by Embassy personnel who observed in Gori buses loading up IDPs from the camp there. The Georgian press on October 10 announced that 40,000 IDPs were returning to their homes in Shida Kartli. Quick approval of our proposed 1207 projects will help us assist these returning IDPs. End Summary and Comment.

STICKY WICKETS

¶12. (C) EUMM staff showed Tbilisi-based Ambassadors a map of all Russian observation posts (OP), noting all had been evacuated, with Russian forces back on the west side of the Enguri in Abkhazia. There continue to be disagreements under whose mission authority the Perevi and Pakhuliani OPs fall. There has been confusion as well over some checkpoints because different names are being used. EUMM observers said there does appear to be additional fortification on the west side of the Enguri. The Russians appear to be entrenched, with no imminent departure from Akhalgori, and two observation points North of Odzisi.

RUSSIANS CHECK THE BOX

¶3. (C) Haber said that after October 10 the Russians will argue that they have complied in full with the cease-fire agreement points and this is when he predicted difficulties. The Russians will have to keep the Ossetian irregulars, who may attempt to provoke Georgian police forces stationed just across the border, under control and ensure that they do not harass returning Georgian IDPs. In an effort to address concerns that the Georgian police were indistinguishable from the Georgian armed forces (ref A) due to the same digital camouflage uniforms, Georgian police will wear designated Qcamouflage uniforms, Georgian police will wear designated armbands to differentiate themselves. The Russians are now pushing EUMM to sign an agreement that would in effect have the EUMM take up the previous CIS area of responsibility. Haber believed that this concept had the consent of Moscow and would put EUMM in a position to maintain law and order. This is not in the EUMM mandate and could set the stage for a "blame game" later when EUMM observers are unable to deliver. Haber is working on what he called a "settlement dispute mechanism" that would bring together Georgian and Ossetian police forces to deal with individual conflicts and incidents (ref A).

THE NEXT STEPS

¶4. (C) FM Kouchner arrived in Tbilisi October 9, and planned to travel October 10 to Gori and with EUMM monitors to villages in the buffer zone. According to Ambassador Haber, high on Kouchner's list would be discussion of the issue of Akhalgori and its future. Asked what the EUMM's public statements would be in forthcoming days, Haber replied, "Kouchner will be focused on the EU message." The

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British Ambassador emphasized that the international community needed to be engaged on resolution on the status of Akhalgori underlining that there are more parties involved in the agreement than the Georgians. Any statements should be addressed to all members of the conflict. The Dutch Ambassador emphasized human rights issues should not be lost in the larger issues of security. (Comment: Minister of Justice Gvaramia announced on October 9 that the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg has imposed more obligations on Russia to protect human rights on the zones under Russian Control. The same court is slated to rule on Georgia's case on allegations of Russian "ethnic cleansing" on October 15, ref B. End Comment.)

GEORGIANS MOVE QUICKLY TO FILL THE BUFFER ZONE

¶5. (SBU) As soon as word spread that the bulk of Russian troops were pulling back from their Observation posts and checkpoints, thousands of ethnic Georgians immediately began making preparations to return to villages that had been located behind Russian checkpoints. Embassy officers in Gori October 9 reported that buses were full of families heading north; they saw one family and all their belongings stuffed into a single taxi. The head of the largest tent-camp in Gori told emboffs that they were probably the last official visitors to the collection point since everyone was heading home. UNHCR representatives in Tbilisi told the Ambassador that more than 9,000 IDPs had left temporary shelters and collection centers in a rush to return home. However, although many homes and buildings are still standing in these villages, UNHCR reports that most have been completely stripped of everything of value. One press report quoted a returning IDP who said that the Russian troops had "even taken their cups." Another concern is the possibility that some of the villagers may find UXO and mines in or around their villages as they seek to save their harvests, pick fruit in orchards and collect scattered livestock.

RESETTLING PERMANENT IDPS

¶6. (SBU) Although many have returned home, those

permanently-displaced IDPs from ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia and the Upper Kodori remain in collective centers or continue to live with friends and relatives. On Thursday, October 9, the Georgian government's coordinator for internally displaced persons (IDP) housing, Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili hosted a tour of the Tserovani housing project, where approximately 2,000 new homes are being constructed. Tserovani is a village located approximately 30 minutes west of Tbilisi, in Mtskheta District. The one-story houses are built of cement block and corrugated tin roofs. They are a standard size of 65 square meters, suitable for a family of four persons. They are comprised of a living room, two-bedrooms, bathroom and kitchen, and will have electricity, gas, water and sewage. The houses cost approximately \$20,000. Plans are to house families from the Akhalgori area in this development.

¶17. (SBU) During the tour, the Minister described the government's plans for resettlement of IDPs permanently displaced by the conflict in August. Construction, renovation and acquisition of approximately 6,220 houses is currently underway where up to an estimated 30,000 permanently displaced people will be resettled. The plan is being executed quite rapidly, with the expectation that houses will be delivered to IDPs, with title, by mid-November. Besides Mtskheta District, houses are being Qmid-November. Besides Mtskheta District, houses are being constructed, renovated and purchased in Kareli, Kaspi and Gori Districts. The hope is to house as many IDPs within some proximity of their residences prior to the conflict. Approximately 970 flats will be repaired in the other regions for Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti, south and east of Tbilisi respectively.

¶18. (SBU) The Minister indicated that the government was concerned about the socialization and economic livelihoods of the resettled IDPs, and hoped that the international community would support such programs. (Embassy note. This is the focus of the mission's proposed 1207 projects currently under review in the Department. End note.) The GoG would be providing some agricultural land, along with houses, to families who had originally come from rural enclaves in South Ossetia. With the opening of the former "buffer zone," and repatriation taking place at a rapid pace, IDP numbers in collection centers are declining. We are currently gathering information on IDPs who remain in collection centers to estimate the housing gap that will exist after the GoG distributes permanent housing for up to 30,000 people later this year.

TEFFT